

## Country Pie

**J**ANUARY, GATEWAY TO THE YEAR, a time for fresh hope and maybe a few resolutions but, as we are all aware, many of these good intentions founder on the rocks of eventuality before too long. The New Year was ushered in with a bang, several actually, in our part of the village with a local private celebration of fireworks which we all had the benefit of! What a superb day it proved to be with blue skies, sunshine and a crisp frost, just the job for walking off some of the surplus weight gained over the Christmas period.

The weather pattern towards the end of December and at present, rather suggests that we may be in for a conventional winter this year with the hard frosts, and possibly snowfalls, giving way we hope to a normal and timely spring, something we are rather unaccustomed to in recent years. The fruitful autumn provided those beautiful thrushes from Scandinavia, the fieldfares and redwings plenty to feed on, but as their natural food becomes scarcer these usually shy birds are now seen in quantities nearer human habitation, coming into orchards, for instance, to feed on some of the fallen apples. Most thrushes enjoy pecking away at apple cores and those soft, bruised apples that are lurking somewhere in the fruit bowl can be tossed out in the garden. Blackbirds in particular are very partial to them. Another now over wintering songster, the blackcap, also tucks into these fruity morsels.

If you are feeding your garden birds, as I hope you are, can I remind you that access to fresh water is imperative, particularly when it is icy. I know that it is a bit of a nuisance replenishing frozen bowls but you may be saving a few feathered lives, for they not only have to drink but, perish the thought, have to keep their wings in good order by bathing too.

## by Tony Boardman

By the way, if you have a pool in your garden and are worried about your goldfish being frozen in, get a kettle of boiling water, melt a hole in the ice and pop an old tennis ball in the hole. Whatever you do, DON'T break the ice because the shock waves can kill the fish beneath. An even better idea is to float a ball there before the ice forms!

Candlemas Day, the day that celebrates the purification of the Virgin Mary, falls on February 2nd. Country folk used to tell us that "If Candlemas Day be fair and bright, winter will have another flight. If Candlemas Day be cloud and rain, then winter will not come again".

At present, in early January as I write, our gardens are looking particularly drab, with masses of dead foliage which gives an extremely unsightly appearance and there is a temptation to rush out at the first opportunity to hoick out the taller stalks like hollyhocks and evening primroses for instance. That sad, flattened soil in the flower beds is crying out to be forked over too.

My advice is to resist the desire to get amongst it just yet as you might do more harm than good. There are many spring bulbs burgeoning below the surface and sure as eggs, if you strike a fork or spade into the earth you will find that or have sliced through a clump of narcissi! It's a veritable minefield there at this time of the year but it is also a pleasant reminder that spring is really just around the corner.

Sue and I tend to leave all those dead stalks as they do attract some of the finches, like the pretty little goldfinch, into the garden and they make a delightful sight as they acrobatically prise the seeds out to feast upon. Now is the time to browse through the seed catalogues to make your selections. Last year, although we don't have a greenhouse, I had some success with one

or two items and the encouragement is there to chance my arm once more.

Also, Sue and I have always been keen on violas, in particular, and have joined the National Viola and Pansy Society. Although it does have a rather grand title we have discovered that they are extremely helpful and, certainly for the very modest subscription fee, are excellent value. If you are fascinated with, or have violas or pansies growing in your garden and wish to know more I would be only too pleased to put you in touch with them.

Now, I really *must* get out of the garden or I shall have Mr. Mitchell giving me some advice of his own! Apart from anything else with his years of experience he really does know what he is talking about.

My wife will tell you that I am a great collector of "useless information". I find that the English language is full of interest and many words and expressions that we take for granted and are used in everyday conversation yield many interesting facts.

Do we stop to think that when we take our leave of friends and loved ones, particularly when they depart on holiday or go away for a while, or when we lose someone very close, we say "goodbye", which simply means "God be with you"? The oft used swear word "bloody" is possibly more blasphemous than rude because it is the condensed form of "By our Lady", which suggests that it has been around in one form or another since this country's Catholic days.

What do you make of the term "Cheerio"? We usually use this as a cheery departure, possibly from friends at the Local. Do we not say "Cheers" when taking our first sip of a drink for instance, although rather sadly in recent years it has become another word for "thank you"? The connection to booze, however, is a correct assumption as hosts at the upper crust parties in 18th Century London would summon up sedan chairs from out of the streets by shouting "Chair Ho" and

two chaps would rush up, probably saying "Where to Guv?" as the well oiled guest attempted to clamber aboard.

I suppose the oriental rickshaw, still used today, would be the nearest form to the sedan chair. A taxi service of yesteryear but, I fancy, rather unwieldy particularly if the fare was corpulent. One advantage, of course, is that unlike the normally chatty taxi driver, the two fellows carrying the poles would be out of puff after a few minutes.

People's surnames and place names are also interesting. Take, for instance, Chipping Norton. "Chipping" literally means a market town. The old English word "tun" meant that it was an establishment of some kind, generally an enclosed farm, obviously with people in attendance. Hence "Norton" meaning that it was north of, in this case, Bromsgrove.

Our names and the places we live in are with us for a reason. Some are obvious as in the surname "Robinson" and the trade name "Archer" or "Bowman", but others need a little more ferreting out. The Welsh for "son of" is "ap", consequently we get "ap Hugh" becoming "Pugh", "ap Richard" becoming "Prichard" and so on. Interesting isn't it?

Time is running out so I leave you with the thoughts of a young teenager who wrote "If we could just get everyone to close their eyes and visualise world peace for an hour, imagine how serene and quiet it would be, until the looting started". You don't always have to be old to become a sage.

Over the Christmas period surely your children or grandchildren have said something innocently amusing. If so, don't keep it to yourself, let us all have a share of it.

Please phone me on 01993-831332, and this applies of course should you want details of the Viola and Pansy Society.

Cheer up. The snowdrops should be out by the time you are reading this!